In *The Women of Shin Hanga* and a related exhibition students will travel to Japan and discover woodblock prints spanning three centuries. Early prints from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depict a range of subjects, from lively heroic and historical narratives to beautifully composed images of annual Japanese celebrations. Inspired by the superb craftsmanship of earlier woodblock prints, *shin hanga* artists revived this printmaking tradition in the early twentieth century. *Shin hanga* (which means “new prints”) capture the idealized beauty of Japanese women as it evolves over the first half of the twentieth century. Students will also come to appreciate
the technical complexity involved in producing these exquisite woodblock prints.

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**Pre-Visit Activity**  
**Looking at Japanese Woodblock Prints**

**Objective**  
Students will:
1. Look briefly at and discuss an image of a twentieth century woodblock print that depicts a ghost story of a heron and a young maiden;
2. Watch a YouTube video of a Japanese Kabuki actor performing the ghost story of the heron and the maiden through dance;
3. Learn how traditional Japanese woodblock prints are made.

**Materials needed for this activity**

- **Access to the Internet.**
- Image of Kitano Tsunetomi’s *Heron Maiden* (provided at the end of this document)
- Image of a white heron (provided at the end of this document)

**Note:** If Internet access is unavailable, skip step 3 in Part I and all of Part II. Reading the story aloud in step 2 will be sufficient.

**Method**  
**Part I**  
**Two ways of telling the same story**

1. Inform students that when they visit the Hood Museum of Art, they will be looking at Japanese woodblock prints made between the late 1700s and the mid-1900s. These prints feature images of landscapes, heroic stories, and beautiful and elaborately dressed women.

2. Show students the image of Kitano Tsunetomi’s *Heron Maiden* and, in a brief discussion, invite students to share what they see. This can be a simple, straightforward conversation about what students observe. Once they have shared their observations, read the following aloud.

Some Japanese woodblock artists took inspiration for their work from ancient folk stories and legends. There are many stories in which animals magically turn into humans to work mischief or to repay good deeds that people have done for them.
This woodblock print entitled *Heron Maiden* tells a very old and popular ghost story. In this story, a young man rescued a wounded heron, cared for it, and set it free.

(Show students the image of a white heron to remind them of what a real heron looks like and then continue the story while showing the image of *Heron Maiden*.)

Soon after releasing the heron, the young man met a beautiful and charming girl. Where she came from, nobody knew. He quickly fell in love with her, and they married. For several months they were happy. The woman had a special skill of weaving beautiful brocade which her new husband sold to support the two of them. She told her husband she would happily continue to make the brocade as long as he didn’t see her while she was working. Well, the husband couldn’t resist temptation. He peeked in on her one day hoping to find his wife weaving. Instead, he found a heron weaving. She was the heron he had saved. With great sadness, she turned into a beautiful young woman for the last time just long enough to let her husband know that she could take the form of a human as long as her real identity remained a secret. And so, with her real identity a secret no longer, the young woman turned into a heron once again and died.

This story has endured for more than one thousand years. About three hundred years ago, it became a popular story for Kabuki actors to preform in the theater. Performers still dance this story today.

3. Go to the following link:
   [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4q1MPwD7zCI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4q1MPwD7zCI)
to see a kabuki actor performing a section of this ghost story in which the heron turns into a young maiden.

This section lasts ten minutes, and if you cannot watch this video in its entirety, watch the first three minutes and scan forward to the final three minutes. It is in the final two minutes that the heron changes out of her white kimono to erupt into the elaborate, red kimono of a charming young maiden. Once the video ends, show the image of *Heron Maiden* print again and invite students to think about what these two artistic expressions have in common:
You have seen how visual artists and actors use different methods to tell the same story. How are the print of the *Heron Maiden* and the video similar? Think about:

**Composition** (How shapes are arranged on the page or the stage. Are there a lot of shapes or very few?)

**Color**

**Body language** (Look at how each person is holding her body)

**Facial expression** (What can or can’t you see in each face?)

Overall **mood** of each work.

How do the woodblock artists and actor each communicate the spirit of the heron?

**Part II**

**How is a woodblock print made?**

1. Explain to students that to make a woodblock print, an artist must do the following:
   a. Carve a design into a wooden block;
   b. Add ink to the surface of that carved design;
   c. Set paper on top of the inked surface;
   d. Rub the paper as it sits on the inked surface to transfer the ink to the paper.

2. To see this illustrated very clearly, log onto:

   **http://www.dartmouth.edu/~arthistory/facstaff/hockley.html.**

   Scroll down to the bottom of the page to find a LINK to Japanese prints at the Hood Museum of Art. Next, choose print production. You can click on the LINK to watch a short video summarizing woodblock print production or you can simply click on the still photo options called carving processes, printing processes, or building a multi-block print which are all terrific.

   If you have time, I would strongly suggest the last LINK. Explain to students that each color included in a woodblock print requires a separate block and printing. This link very succinctly shows that process of multiple-block printing.
Kitano Tsenetomi, *Heron Maiden*, about 1925.
White Heron